3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

487 milking the sheep and goats by the water's edge while the men and children looked on.

[231] Next morning we awoke to find a brilliant sun shining on a cheerful scene composed of yaks, yak-calves, donkeys, ponies, sheep, goats, curly-headed children, rainbow-clothed white-turbaned women and one to two shaggy men (the rest were still in bed), against a background of fat mushroom-like *aq-ois*, foaming river and steep green hill-side. I had decided to halt a day at this pleasant spot, partly to give the caravan a rest, partly in order to reconnoitre on foot a pass called the Merki Davan by which I hoped to cross into the upper Qara-tash valley and thus gain access to one of the blank patches on the map which Sir Aurel Stein had advised me to explore. To cut a long story short,[1] Gerard Price and I, assisted by Juma Beg with his men and yaks, reached a height of 16,500 feet on a snowy spur, from which point we could see that the "pass" was quite out of the question for our caravan. It was nothing but a lofty ridge of rock at least 17,000 feet high, deep in snow even on the south side and defended also by steep ice-slopes.

• [758] Meanwhile D. passed a strenuous but amusing day with the Kirghiz ladies, all of whom clamoured (mostly quite unnecessarily) for medical treatment and seemed to appreciate presents of quinine tabloids and castor oil even more than the beads and other small gifts which D. had brought for them. At any rate, she made herself very popular, for next morning when we marched down the valley their farewells were most affectionate and they walked at her stirrup quite a long way down the valley. One of the younger ones was perfectly lovely; the coloured sketch of her which was done by D. on this occasion and is reproduced as a frontispiece to this book does not flatter her unduly. As a rule, however, the faces of the Kirghiz women, though broad-browed and pleasing, are too flat for beauty.

[37] As we filed down the Yambulak valley it became ever narrower and its sides higher and steeper. The profusion of wild flowers was a revelation; anemones, primulas, king-cups, columbines, antirrhinums, campanulas, asphodel and many others of which we did not know the names grew in masses, especially in places where the sheep and goats could not get at them. Cascades of wild roses grew out of every

[1] For an account of this climb, see "Geographical Journal," November, 1925, p. 388.